

Living With Cancer

If protecting your fertility is important to you because you hope to have children in the future, you need to plan. Just one cancer treatment can affect your ability to have children. So, talk to your oncologist right away to get information and start the process. Here are steps that may guide you.

Talk To Your Oncologist About The Risk Of Infertility

When you meet with your doctor, it may be helpful to ask these questions:

- Is my cancer likely to cause infertility?
- Are my treatments likely to cause infertility?
- Are there other treatments that would be effective for me but that have a lower risk of infertility?
- Can you refer me to an infertility doctor?

Find A Doctor With Experience Treating Infertility In People With Cancer

To find a specialist or to learn more about cancer and infertility, your care team can provide you with information about infertility in people with cancer and with the names of infertility physicians.

Talk To The Infertility Doctor About Your Options For Protecting Your Fertility

Here are some questions that may be helpful for you to ask the specialist:

- What reproductive options are available and safe for me?
- What are the infertility doctor's success rates for these options?
- Will these options require a delay in my cancer treatment? If so, how long?
- How much will these options cost?

For more information about sperm and egg preservation, please speak to your oncologist.

Sexuality is an important part of who we are. Feelings about sexuality affect our relationships with others, our self-image, and our zeal for living.

Cancer diagnosis and treatment may affect your ability to experience the intimacy you desire. As sexuality and intimacy are very personal parts of our human existence, it can be awkward for patients, partners, and health care providers to discuss it.

Even though it may be awkward, if you are not satisfied with your desire or ability for sex or intimacy, we encourage you to discuss these issues with your oncologist, nurse, or social worker. There are medications, treatments, and support for you. In addition, we have some literature available that may be helpful such as the American Cancer Society's booklets on sexuality and cancer. We will be happy to provide you with the literature we have on hand as well as a list of recommended web resources.

For 2-3 days following chemotherapy, there will be some trace elements of the drug in semen and vaginal fluids. You should use a condom to prevent irritation and avoid oral sex for 2-3 days following chemotherapy. Additionally, if you are sexually active while receiving chemotherapy, it will be important to prevent pregnancy.

Effects of Cancer Treatment on Sexuality and Desire

- Change in desire
- Change in body image due to surgery and/or hair loss
- Hormonal changes that may result in mood swings, hot flashes, insomnia
- Emotional distress related to the diagnosis and treatment
- Fatigue
- Vaginal dryness
- Difficulty with erection
- Difficulty achieving orgasm
- Pain

If you need to discuss sexuality or intimacy issues, your cancer care team – your doctor, nurse, and social worker – is more than willing to work with you to help resolve your issues.

Glutamine is an amino acid that appears to be used by oral and nerve tissues, and when taken in large doses seems to speed healing. We recommend its use to reduce the severity of mouth sores, and to help reduce the symptoms and time to heal for peripheral neuropathy caused by some chemotherapy drugs (Taxol, Vincristine, Oxaliplatin).

This is not something to take to prevent side effects, but more to treat the effect when it occurs. In the case of mouth sores, it would be best to start taking the Glutamine after the first sign of mouth sores and to continue until the sores resolve. Restarting the Glutamine at the next chemotherapy treatment would be prudent.

DOSE: The dose is 15 grams 2 times daily, suspended in water or juice. It does not have a taste, but it does have a texture: it's gritty. Taking Glutamine less frequently will probably reduce its effectiveness.

Where Do I Get It?

1) **Vitamin Adventure, 2350 Santa Rosa Ave, Suite D (707-570-0145)**

Located in the same building as Comcast, is the least expensive in Sonoma County. Across Kawana Springs Road from the Costco shopping center.

2) www.vitacost.com and www.amazon.com are two online sources that may be more economical.

Who Should Not Take Glutamine

- Advanced liver disease or cirrhosis
- Advanced kidney disease on a protein-restricted diet
- Prone to seizures
- Bipolar disorder
- Sensitivity to MSG

Many things can contribute to constipation. Narcotic pain relief, inactivity, a low fiber diet and poor fluid intake can all be included. Narcotic pain relievers and some chemotherapy drugs affect the nerves that stimulate the intestines and slow the passage of food, causing constipation. Therefore, if you are prescribed narcotic pain relievers or are treated with chemo drugs that slow intestinal movement, it is very important to also prevent constipation by the following regimen:

- 1 stool softener – Colace/Docusate Sodium (250 mg) – morning and evening AND 1 Senokot or Senna (Laxative) morning and evening.
- If no results after two days, 2 Senokots morning and evening (it is safe to continue increasing the Senokot until the constipation is relieved).

If the stool becomes too loose: decrease the number of Senokot but continue the stool softeners as directed here.

If bowel movements are regular but stools are hard: increase the number of stool softeners to two times per day.

- Increase fluids whenever possible. Fruit juices and nectars can also contain fiber, which helps the stool absorb water.
 - Remember – caffeine causes fluid loss, so please limit caffeinated drinks.
 - Cheese, bananas, and ice cream tend to worsen constipation.
- Whenever possible, increase exercise. This helps the digestive process and helps prevent fatigue. Consider a walk around the block or yard 3-4 times per week – whatever you can do will help!

For Chemotherapy-related diarrhea, please consider the following Imodium-AD regimen:

- 2 tablets at the first onset of diarrhea
- 1 tablet every 2 hours until you are diarrhea free for 12 hours
- During the night, take 2 tablets every 4 hours

If these measures are not effective, or if you have any questions or concerns, please call:

Chemotherapy Pharmacist – 707-393-2079

Chemotherapy Nurse – 707-393-4634 (press “1” for a Nurse)

For after-hours and/or weekends and holidays, please call:

Medicine Advice Center – 707-393-4044

To help you prepare for chemotherapy, here is a shopping list of groceries and other items you are likely to need. Buying these items ahead of time will save you time and energy later when you may be busy with medical appointments and when you may be more tired.

Stock Up On Groceries

- Fluids such as apple juice, grape juice, fruit nectar, soup, broth, sports drinks, ginger ale, watermelon, Jell-O, popsicles, sherbet, and herbal teas.
- Bland foods such as rice, potatoes, pasta, oatmeal, cereal, bread, crackers, cottage cheese, yogurt, skinless chicken, fish, eggs, sliced turkey, applesauce, and bananas.
- High protein snacks such as cheese, yogurt, nuts, and peanut butter.

Other Items You Are Likely To Need

- Thermometer – any type will do.
- Soft or children’s toothbrush – for gentle mouth care.
- Baking soda – to make a mild mouthwash.
- Lip balm with sunscreen – to protect and moisturize your lips.
- Sunscreen (SPF 30 or greater) – to protect your skin, which may be more sensitive to the sun during chemo.
- Hand sanitizers – an easy way to keep your hands clean.
- Tylenol or other mild pain medication – for a headache or fever which can occur during treatment.
- Docusate Sodium (DSS) – a stool softener because some medications you receive can cause constipation.
- Senna – a mild, natural laxative because constipation can occur as a side effect of some medications you receive.
- Milk of magnesia – another laxative that you may need.

Other Items You May Need

- Hat, scarf, or wig – if you will lose your hair.
- Condoms – to protect your partner if you are sexually active and to prevent pregnancy during chemo.
- Benadryl (Diphenhydramine) – if your doctor or nurse recommends it.
- Imodium – for diarrhea if this is a possible side effect of your chemo.

